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Could Soviets have a spy high in CIA?

By William Greider
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WASHINGTON — If one collected conversational crumbs from some of the best tables in Washington, it would seem that a great spy novel is unfolding in our midst: a plot in search of a real-life villain.

Perhaps it will be the next great scandal that rocks the American government. Or maybe it is a lot of empty luncheon gossip, laced with the political mischief and bureaucratic malice peculiar to the nation's capital.

The subject is spies and the unanswered question is whether the Central Intelligence Agency, after all its other troubles of recent years, has another one much more serious. Has the CIA been infiltrated, somehow, by a Soviet "mole," an intelligence officer who has burrowed upward, high enough to betray class and country in the manner of Britain's Kim Philby? Or perhaps less dramatically, is



Cartoon illustration by Geoffrey Moss

there a bitter soul selling out secrets for cash?

The CIA director, Stansfield Turner, felt required recently to deny it, while assuring the public that the CIA is ever vigilant against the possibility. No one can prove that there is not a "mole" somewhere in the intelligence community. Likewise, no one has anything beyond

Whether or not there is a mole high in CIA, the mole has been invoked to pay off old bureaucratic scores, fortify the cause of tighter secrecy laws or to raise suspicions about present or former CIA top officials.

In recent weeks, some important names have expressed concern or asked questions about former CIA Director Richard Helms, for instance, remarked to New York Magazine.

"The Kampanis case raises the question of whether or not there has been infiltration of the United States intelligence community or government at a significant level."

William Kampanis, an ex-CIA "watch officer," was convicted earlier this month on espionage charges, accused of selling a very secret CIA manual on satellite surveillance to the Soviets. The peculiar circumstances of his access and arrest upset many ex-intelligence officers and some senators who oversee the subject.

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"Deeply disturbed" is the phrase. The case suggests to many that either the CIA is grossly loose and incompetent in its operations, or there is a more sinister explanation. Some think both are plausible.

The Kampiles trial was not exactly reassuring, though it did seem to lend weight to the case for incompetence over treachery. Among other things, it was revealed that 13 very secret manuals, not just one, are missing. The CIA went beyond its standard response of "no comment" to make this statement: "A review of security procedures within the CIA is now under way."

Helms, for one, was not comforted reading newspaper accounts of the trial. "There are," he said, "enough anomalies in that case to raise some unresolved questions. I still think there are anomalies and unexplained questions."

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has made similar remarks around town. Kissinger, it is said, asks the same questions that others raise: is it possible that Kampiles was somehow a pawn, used to conceal another Soviet agent within? Is it plausible that America's intelligence apparatus has been somehow compromised?

For whatever it means, Kissinger has lent his name to a promotional blurb for a new book by Edward Jay Epstein, "Legend," which devotes 316 pages of closely argued fact and theory to the proposition that the CIA was "turned inside out" long before the Kampiles case.

Epstein embraces the view of retired counterintelligence officers who believe their agency has accepted a fake Soviet defector and thereby buried the warning from an earlier defector who said a "mole" does, indeed, exist, high up. Kissinger thinks the book raises "vital questions."

Perhaps the most bizarre reaction is from former Director William Colby, whose battle with the counterintelligence folks over domestic spying and other matters was aired three years ago. Colby is declaring at public appearances, without a trace of humor, "I am not a mole."

Whoever said he was? Well, nobody did exactly, but that is one of the malicious suggestions afloat in Washington, gossip posed with oblique questions and impish smiles. Colby, who is now a lawyer in private practice, is not amused.

"In my career," Colby said dryly, "I've been accused of just about everything. I answer the allegations. I don't get emotional."

It is easy enough to observe — as many

counterintelligence officers do — that probability argues strongly for the existence of a planted Soviet agent in the US intelligence apparatus. If the Russians were able to penetrate the British, German, French and Italian spy organizations, as they have over the years, why should America be immune? In this twilight realm of spies, the strongest argument for the existence of an American "mole" is the fact that none was ever caught.

Beyond that, however, the evidence gets terribly tangled. Was Nosenko lying? If so, was Galitsin telling the truth? If Igor was a Soviet-controlled double, why did the CIA send Shadrin to his tragic rendezvous in Vienna? Who was Anatoly Filatov and how did the KGB catch him? Why is Fedora still trusted by the FBI? And what of poor Sasha, who was fingered by Igor?

You get the idea. These are all deadly serious questions that intelligence professionals kick around among themselves.

And last week President Jimmy Carter declared he was not satisfied with intelligence reporting and ordered Turner and other national security aides to improve the political analyses reaching his desk. The most recent unsatisfactory work was the scouting report on Iran, a report — made well after rioting had begun in that country — which concluded that "Iran is not in a revolutionary or even prerevolutionary situation."

Old hands who were "reorganized" out of their clandestine careers have become bitter, and the sour public atmosphere has

loosened tongues.

"We obviously have a problem with security," Colby said. "That's different from having a mole. There's obviously a lessening of discipline, morale, commitment, if you will."

The ranks of the retired include many who blame Colby for those problems, particularly his handling as director of the sensational CIA scandals in 1975. Colby, an adroit political operator, went public with the agency's embarrassing sins as a way to calm the country and assure it that the ugly past was truly past. Whether Colby's strategy made things better or worse for the agency is still a hot topic among those who believe, in any case, that he violated the cardinal rules of "clandestinity," as one of them calls it.

Thomas Powers, author of a coming biography of Richard Helms, suggested that there is a kind of psychic revenge involved in all of the gossip emanating from people who used to pride themselves on total secrecy.

In a sense, the public is hearing bits and pieces of a discreet war that has gone on secretly within the CIA for nearly two decades. Long debate between the CIA's counterintelligence shop under James J. Angleton and foreign-intelligence officers like Colby, who thought Angleton's folks saw communist agents under every bed. Colby fired Angleton in 1975 and reorganized counterintelligence. The argument still rages over whether Colby's action crippled the agency's security or merely wiped out its paranoia.

This struggle originated in 1961 when a Soviet defector named Galitsin (code-named Stone) reported that a "mole" had gained access to the agency's vital core. The search for the "mole" began in earnest, complicated by other Russian defectors who followed, telling a bewildering series of contradictory stories.

While counterintelligence scrutinized each defector for hard truth, suspicions were also raised about fellow CIA officers. According to various sources, at least three officers of some rank have come under suspicion as "moles" at different times and, while the evidence did not convince the CIA that any of them was disloyal, each case left ambiguity or suspicion.

"One officer had come under suspicion through a gross leap in logic," Colby wrote in his memoirs, "Honorable Men." "A defector had remarked that the Soviets were in contact with a CIA officer in a particular city. By a process of elimination, suspicion had settled on this one. But absolutely no other evidence was ever found to support it, even after careful check. Nonetheless, the officer was sent off to a distant and dead-end post for a number of years as a result."

In any case, the bile between Angleton's admirers and Colby's contributes a lot of the poison to the atmosphere. So does the bad feeling between Colby and Helms, who was convicted of lying to the US Senate. Helms' friends feel the ex-director would never have faced this dis-

grace if Colby had handled the business of secrets differently.

In the short run, this new fear of "moles" may help maintain some political objectives for various interests. The FBI is campaigning again for more agents to chase down Soviet spies. Opponents of the arms-limitation talks are using this subject as yet another reason not to trust the Russians. The official intelligence community is fortified in its quest for stiffer

secrecy restrictions. All the suspicion may help persuade Congress that, just as in the old days, it really doesn't want to know all of the dirty secrets, after all.

In the long run, however, the "mole" theories also may damage the CIA if it creates another layer of public paranoia about secret operations and CIA trustworthiness.

And why have this big secret organization with a secret budget if you're penetrated by Soviet agents?"